

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
17 July 2003 (17.07.2003)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 03/058559 A2

(51) International Patent Classification⁷: **G07B**
(21) International Application Number: PCT/US02/41218
(22) International Filing Date:
24 December 2002 (24.12.2002)
(25) Filing Language: English
(26) Publication Language: English
(30) Priority Data:
60/342,096 26 December 2001 (26.12.2001) US
60/342,097 26 December 2001 (26.12.2001) US
60/426,383 15 November 2002 (15.11.2002) US
10/327,611 24 December 2002 (24.12.2002) US
10/327,612 24 December 2002 (24.12.2002) US
unassigned 24 December 2002 (24.12.2002) US

(81) Designated States (*national*): AE, AG, AL, AU, BA, BB, BR, BZ, CA, CN, CO, CR, CU, DM, DZ, EC, GD, GE, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KP, KR, LC, LK, LR, LT, LV, MA, MG, MK, MN, MX, NO, NZ, OM, PH, PL, RO, SG, TN, TT, UA, UZ, VN, YU, ZA.

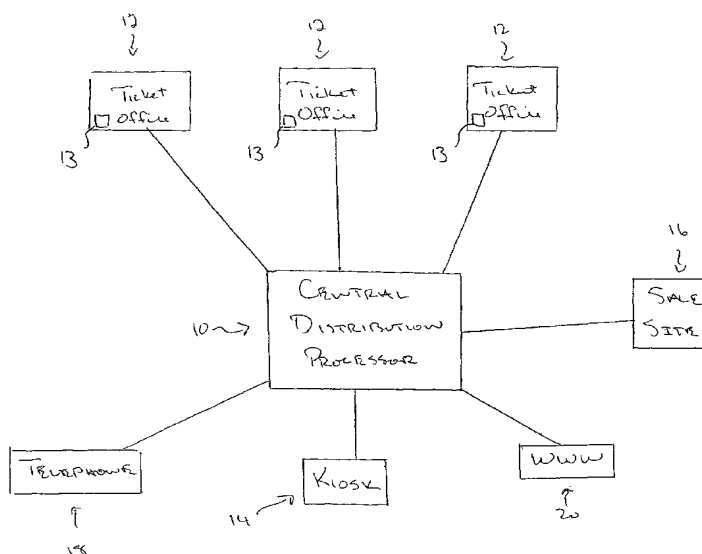
(84) Designated States (*regional*): ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:
— without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report

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For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: TICKET AND RESERVATION DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM



(57) Abstract: A system for the distribution of tickets and restaurant reservations. The system includes a central distribution processor to which consumers are provided access for determining availability and purchasing tickets and/or restaurant reservations. The system also includes a plurality of remote venues linked to the central distribution processor, the remote venues including interface software compatible with the central distribution processor for facilitating the uploading of relevant information to the central distribution processor. The interface software further provides a user interface through which the plurality of remote venues selectively enter available information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor for access and purchase by consumers.



WO 03/058559 A2

TITLE: TICKET AND RESERVATION DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM
BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The invention relates to a distribution system for tickets and reservations.

2. Description of the Prior Art

Many businesses operate in a “use it or lose it” environment in which services are placed in the public domain and are forever wasted if a consumer does not take advantage of the service being offered. For example, theatrical performances are generally scheduled for a specific time and go on whether the house is full or empty. Any unused and/or unsold seats represent a total loss. The loss associated with the unused or unsold seats may not be recouped, since the cost of the production is substantially the same whether that seat is or is not used.

Similarly, the costs associated with the operation of a restaurant are substantially the same whether every table is filled for the entire evening or not. That is, the restaurant owner is responsible for paying the staff, utilities and other expenses associated with the operation of a restaurant whether the restaurant is full or not. In fact, food costs associated with a specific meal are minimal when the overall operating costs of a restaurant are considered. Use of these tables, even when food is discounted, would result in a benefit to the restaurant when compared to total non-use commonly encountered during low volume times. For example, profit is made on the discounted meal, wait staff receives additional tips and beverage expenses add to the overall gross income of the restaurant.

Further to the problems discussed above, for as long as people have sought out entertainment in the form of spectator events, people have competed to obtain the best tickets or, in the event of very popular events, any ticket at all. In most instances, these “premium tickets” are very difficult to obtain. Apart from standing in line, waiting on the telephone or sitting on the Internet for many hours (and hoping you are lucky enough to obtain premium tickets), the only certain way for obtaining premium tickets is either by knowing someone closely associated with the event or paying a substantial premium to a ticket broker.

In recent years ticket brokering or scalping has developed into a billion dollar a year business (and oftentimes illegal business). Ticket brokers generally obtain premium tickets by utilizing privilege and access to people responsible for the distribution of the tickets,

purchasing tickets from people with privilege and access to premium tickets and/or paying people to wait in lines or on telephone systems utilized in selling the tickets to desirable spectator events.

The manner in which the ticket distribution business has developed prevents those people most closely associated with the production of the spectator events from making the full profit from the most desirable seats to these sought after spectator events (while ticket brokers do nothing to develop the event but make large sums by reselling premium tickets at an inflated price, which is illegal in some states). Producers of these spectator events limit themselves to the face value of the tickets which they sell, even if certain tickets might have a higher market value than other tickets. For example, event producers might be able to sell front row seats at a premium price despite the fact that the first ten rows of a spectator event are priced at the same level. However, doing this might be a detriment to customer relations and good will, and producers generally will not add a premium to certain tickets despite the potential for added revenues. As such, those familiar with the production of spectator events and the distribution of tickets appreciate the need for a mechanism by which those most closely associated with the production of a spectator event may make a profit from the market value sale of premium tickets.

As such, both restaurants and theaters attempt various marketing techniques to ensure that their facilities are optimally utilized. Despite these efforts, they are not always successful in optimally making use of their facilities. The present invention provides a system aiding both restaurants and theaters in respectively marketing unused reservations and tickets.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is, therefore, an object of the present invention to provide a system for facilitating the distribution of unused theater tickets. The system includes a central distribution processor to which theater patrons are provided access for determining the availability of theater tickets and purchasing available theater tickets at a discounted rate. The system further includes a plurality of remote ticket offices of distinct theaters linked to the central distribution processor, the remote ticket offices including interface software compatible with the central distribution processor for facilitating the uploading of relevant ticket information to the central distribution processor. The interface software further provides a user interface through which the plurality of remote ticket offices selectively enter available theater ticket information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor for access and purchase by theater patrons.

It is also an object of the present invention to provide a system wherein the theater patron pays a ticketing fee to an operator of the system.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a system wherein the distinct theaters pay the operator a fee based upon the sale of discounted tickets.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide a system wherein the user interface includes a seating chart display through which a remote ticket office employee enters unused ticket information.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a system including a ticket information and sales site at which theater patrons may access the central distribution processor for purchasing tickets.

It also an object of the present invention to provide a method for distributing potentially unused tickets. The method is achieved in the following manner: establishing a central distribution processor which stores information concerning the availability of tickets which may be purchased at a discounted price; installing interface software compatible with the central distribution processor at a plurality of remote ticket offices, the interface software facilitating the uploading of relevant ticket information to the central distribution processor; entering available ticket information at the remote ticket office via a user interface associated with the interface software, the user interface permitting the plurality of remote ticket offices to selectively enter available ticket information for uploading to the central distribution processor; uploading the available ticket information to the central distribution processor; and providing patrons with access to the central

distribution processor for determining the availability of tickets and purchasing available tickets.

It is further an object of the present invention to provide a system for facilitating the distribution of unused tickets. The system includes a central distribution processor to which patrons are provided access for determining the availability of tickets and purchasing available tickets at a discounted rate. The system further includes a plurality of remote ticket offices of distinct venues linked to the central distribution processor, the remote ticket offices including interface software compatible with the central distribution processor for facilitating the uploading of relevant ticket information to the central distribution processor. The interface software further provides a user interface through which the plurality of remote ticket offices selectively enter available ticket information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor for access and purchase by patrons.

Other objects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description when viewed in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, which set forth certain embodiments of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a schematic of the present system.

Figure 2 is an exemplary interface screen in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 3 is a schematic of an alternate embodiment in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 4 is an exemplary interface screen in accordance with the embodiment disclosed with reference to Figure 3.

Figure 5 is a schematic of an alternate embodiment relating to restaurant reservation in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 6 is an exemplary interface screen in accordance with the embodiment disclosed with reference to Figure 5.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The detailed embodiments of the present invention are disclosed herein. It should be understood, however, that the disclosed embodiments are merely exemplary of the invention, which may be embodied in various forms. Therefore, the details disclosed herein are not to be interpreted as limited, but merely as the basis for the claims and as a basis for teaching one skilled in the art how to make and/or use the invention.

With reference to Figure 1, a system for facilitating the distribution of unsold theater tickets is disclosed. The system interconnects a central distribution processor 10 with one or a plurality of remote ticket offices 12 making unused, and/or unsold, tickets available to theater patrons at a discounted rate (for example, half price or 2 for 1) .

More specifically, the system includes a central distribution processor 10 which monitors, maintains and provides access to information regarding the availability of discounted theater tickets. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, theater patrons are provided access to the information maintained in the central distribution process 10 via a kiosk 14, or other patron interface, at which patrons may browse available tickets and purchase seats to those shows they wish to see. The system further includes a plurality of remote ticket offices 12 of distinct theaters (or other venues as discussed below) linked to the central distribution processor 10. The remote ticket offices 12 include interface software 13 compatible with the central distribution processor 10 for facilitating the uploading of relevant ticket information to the central distribution processor 10. The interface software further provides a user interface through which the plurality of remote ticket offices 12 selectively enter available theater ticket information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor 10 for access and purchase by theater patrons.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the central distribution processor 10 is maintained at, or in association with, a ticket information and sales site 16. The ticket information and sales site 16 provides theater patrons with a convenient location at which they may gather ticket information and/or purchase available theater tickets. The ticket information and sales site 16 is further provided with a plurality of computer terminals, operated by employees of the company operating the present system. It is further contemplated that theater patrons may obtain ticket and sales information via telephone 18 or a global communication network 20 (e.g., WWW). Although the communication systems described above are generally wire based, communication may be

achieved via wireless systems as may be developed in the future.

The ticket information and sales site 16 is further provided with an information board upon which available tickets, and associated prices, are listed for convenient review by theater patrons in the vicinity of the ticket information and sales site 16. It is contemplated that the information board will take the form of a conventional electronic overhead display or video monitors.

Based upon a preferred set up for the ticket information and sales site 16, a theater patron is provided ready access to ascertain available unused tickets and purchase the same from a system employee. Ticket information is retrieved by either personally consulting with an employee operating a computer terminal directly linked to the central distribution processor 10 or merely reviewing the information presented on the information board positioned for easy access by patrons in the vicinity of the ticket information and sales site.

In an effort to provide patrons with information regarding the various shows for which tickets are available, the ticket information and sales site 16 is further equipped with video monitors showing excerpts of the various shows for which tickets are available. Written literature regarding the various shows is also made available to patrons requiring information before deciding upon which show to see.

As mentioned above, the central distribution processor 10 is linked to a plurality of remote ticket offices 12 of distinct theaters. Facilitating communication between the various theaters participating in the present system and the central distribution processor 10 is an interface software 13 compatible with the central distribution processor 10. The interface software 13 is loaded at each of the remote ticket offices 12 and permits these ticket offices to conveniently and reliably transmit unused ticket information to the central distribution processor 10 such that the unused tickets are immediately made available to theater patrons taking advantage of the present system.

In accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the interface software 13 directs employees of the remote ticket office 12 on entering unused ticket information onto the computer system of the ticket office 12 in such a way that the interface software 13 loaded on the computer system of the ticket office 12 formats the unused ticket information for use by the central distribution processor 10. The ticket office computer system, through the use of the interface software 13, then transmits the formatted ticket information to the central distribution processor 10 such that it may be readily used by the central distribution processor 10. The interface software includes an interface screen 22

provided with a seating diagram of the specific theater. Associated with the seating diagram is pricing information for each show.

With a reference to Figure 2, an interface screen is disclosed which may be used in accordance with the present invention. The interface screen 22 includes an interactive seating chart 24 which may be actuated via a mouse to designate specific seats for sale. Pre-sold seats will either be not shown in the seating chart or colored differently from unsold seats so as to permit operators to readily determine those seats which may be selected in accordance with the present invention. The interface screen 22 also includes drop down menus for indicating the date of the event 26, the time of the event 28 and the price at which the seats should be sold 30. Once all selections are made, the selected information is transmitted to the central distribution processor by clicking on the transmit button 32.

In this way, the remote ticket office employee need only pick a specific show for which he or she wishes to designate unused tickets to be made available via the present system and click upon the specific unused seats shown on the seating diagram to designate those unused tickets the theater wishes to make available through the present system. Once the theater ticket employee selects the designated unused seats, the interface software 13 combines the selected seats with ticket cost information. The information is then formatted and transmitted to the central distribution processor 10. While a preferred embodiment utilizes a computer network for transmitting information to the central distribution processor, it is contemplated that the information may be transmitted in other ways, for example, via facsimile, or other electronic communication mechanisms.

It is contemplated that the unused ticket information will be made available to theater patrons on a daily basis with the unused ticket information being release on a daily basis at a predetermined time before a show. However, since remote ticket offices have control over when to release tickets via the interface software, the remote ticket offices may choose to release tickets throughout the day if they find such a distribution technique enhances overall sales of tickets.

It should be understood that the present system links a plurality of distinct, unrelated theaters through the application of the interface software described above. The present system, therefore, does not require that the distinct theaters operate in a similar manner or that the distinct theaters form a type of affiliation. Rather, the use of the present interface software in conjunction with the central distribution processor allows these distinct theaters to operate independently, while permitting the theaters to readily distribute unused tickets

when it is determined they may go to waste via sales through the theater's own ticket office.

For example, the remote ticket office may decide to release 50 unused tickets at 2 p.m. and later determine to release 50 more unused tickets at 4 p.m. Decision making regarding when and how many tickets to release is enhanced by providing the interface software with functionality permitting the remote ticket office to monitor sales of their released tickets at the ticket information and sales site. Specifically, the remote ticket office is provided with limited access to the central distribution database, permitting retrieval of information concerning ticket sales via the present system. As such, if the remote ticket office finds that the 50 tickets released at 2 p.m. are going quickly, they may decide to release additional tickets to the central distribution processor, if such tickets are still available. The present system allows these remote ticket offices to conveniently, reliably and quickly release tickets to meet theater patrons' needs and ensure that the optimum number of tickets are sold for each and every show.

From a business perspective, it is contemplated that both the patron and remote ticket office will pay the operator of the present system a fee for the use of the present system. Specifically, it is contemplated that the theater patrons will pay a ticketing fee commonly used in conjunction with conventional ticket distribution systems and the remote ticket office is responsible for paying the system operators a fee based upon the value of tickets distributed via the present system.

It is further contemplated that the present invention may similarly be applied in the distribution of premium tickets for which patrons will be expected to pay a price above the established ticket cost. Such a system would be implemented in much the same manner as the discounted distribution system described above. For example, the contemplated system includes a central distribution processor which monitors, maintains and provides access to information regarding the availability of premium theater tickets. The premium tickets for sale by the present system are released via the remote ticket office and this information is forwarded to the central distribution processor in the manner described above with regard to the release of discounted tickets. As discussed above, the remote ticket offices of distinct theaters linked to the central distribution processor include interface software compatible with the central distribution processor for facilitating the uploading of relevant ticket information to the central distribution processor. The interface software further provides a user interface through which the plurality of remote ticket offices selectively enter available theater ticket information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution

processor for access and purchase by theater patrons.

The theater patrons are ultimately provided access to the premium ticket information maintained in the central distribution process via a kiosk, or other patron interface, at which patrons may browse available tickets and purchase seats to those shows they wish to see.

More particularly, and with reference to Figures 3 and 4, a system is disclosed for facilitating the distribution of premium tickets such that producers of the spectator event may make a higher, or market value, profit from the sale of these premium tickets. In accordance with the present invention, the term “premium ticket(s)” is meant to refer to highly sought after tickets for which patrons are willing to pay a premium price. Such “premium tickets” include, but are not limited to, tickets for very popular spectator events (for example, a sold out concert or sporting event), tickets to events for which tickets may not be readily available to the public at large (for example, political fund raising events) and highly desirable seats to spectator events (for example, front row tickets to a theatrical show or box seats to the World Series).

Further, and in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the “producers” of the spectator events for which tickets are sold using the present system are those people intimately responsible for the development and production of the spectator event. For example, producers of a concert may utilize the present system by releasing a select number of seats for sale in accordance with the present invention. Similarly, a sports franchise would utilize the present system by releasing premium seats for sale in accordance with the present system. Theater owners might also take advantage of the present system by releasing a certain number of seats for sale in accordance with the present invention. Generally, the present system is designed to allow “producers” of spectator events to profit from the market value of the “premium seats” in lieu of ticket brokers making a profit from the hard work put in by the producers of these spectator events.

In accordance with the present invention, the system interconnects a central distribution processor 110 with one or a plurality of remote show box offices 112 associated with the spectator event and controlled by producers of the spectator event, making premium tickets available to patrons at a market value price (for example, a ticket having a face value of \$100 might be sold through the system at a market value price of \$200) .

More specifically, the system includes a central distribution processor 110 which monitors, maintains and provides access to information regarding the availability of

premium tickets. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, patrons are provided access to the information maintained in the central distribution processor 110 via a kiosk 114, or other patron interface 118, 120, at which patrons may browse available tickets and purchase seats to those spectator events they wish to see. The system further includes a plurality of remote show box offices 112 of distinct spectator events linked to the central distribution processor 110. The remote show box offices 112 include interface software 113 compatible with the central distribution processor 110 for facilitating the uploading of relevant ticket information to the central distribution processor 110. The interface software 113 further provides a user interface through which the plurality of remote show box offices 112 selectively enter available premium ticket information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor 110 for access and purchase by patrons.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the central distribution processor 110 is maintained at, or in association with, a ticket information and sales site 116. The ticket information and sales site 116 provides patrons with a convenient location at which they may gather ticket information and/or purchase available premium tickets. The ticket information and sales site 116 is further provided with a plurality of computer terminals, operated by employees of the company operating the present system. It is further contemplated that patrons may obtain ticket and sales information, as well as purchase the tickets, via telephone 118 or a global communication network 120 (e.g., WWW). Although the communication systems described above are generally wire based, communication may be achieved via wireless systems as may be developed in the future.

The ticket information and sales site 116 is further provided with an information board upon which available premium tickets, and associated prices, are listed for convenient review by patrons in the vicinity of the ticket information and sales site 116. It is contemplated that the information board will take the form of a conventional electronic overhead display or video monitors.

Based upon a preferred set up for the ticket information and sales site 116, a patron is provided ready access to ascertain available premium tickets and purchase the same from a system employee. Premium ticket information is retrieved by either personally consulting with an employee operating a computer terminal directly linked to the central distribution processor 110 or merely reviewing the information presented on the information board positioned for easy access by patrons in the vicinity of the ticket information and sales site.

In addition, and as briefly discussed above, premium ticket information may be obtained via telephone or via a global communication network such as the Internet.

In an effort to provide patrons with information regarding the various spectator events for which premium tickets are available, the ticket information and sales site 116 is further equipped with video monitors showing excerpts of the various spectator events for which tickets are available. Written literature regarding the various spectator events is also made available to patrons requiring information before deciding upon which event to see.

As mentioned above, the central distribution processor 110 is linked to a plurality of remote show box offices 112 of distinct spectator events. These show box offices 112 are contemplated as being under the control of the spectator event producers such that the producers have complete control of the premium tickets which are released and sold through the present system. Facilitating communication between the various spectator events participating in the present system and the central distribution processor 110 is an interface software 113 compatible with the central distribution processor 110. The interface software 113 is loaded at each of the remote show box offices 112 and permits these show box offices 112 to conveniently and reliably transmit premium ticket information to the central distribution processor 110 such that the premium tickets are immediately made available to patrons taking advantage of the present system.

In accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the interface software 113 directs employees of the remote show box office 112 on entering premium ticket information onto the computer system of the show box office in such a way that the interface software 113 loaded on the computer system of the show box office formats the premium ticket information for use by the central distribution processor 110. The show box office 112 computer system, through the use of the interface software 113, then transmits the formatted premium ticket information to the central distribution processor 110 such that it may be readily used by the central distribution processor 110. It is contemplated that the interface software 113 will include an interface screen 122. The interface screen 122 is provided with a seating diagram, or seating chart, of the venue at which the spectator event is being held. Associated with the seating diagram is pricing information for the premium seats of the spectator event.

With a reference to Figure 4, an interface screen 122 is disclosed which may be used in accordance with the present invention. The interface screen 122 includes an interactive seating chart 124 which may be actuated via a mouse to designate specific seats for sale.

Pre-sold seats will either be not shown in the seating chart or colored differently from unsold seats so as to permit operators to readily determine those seats which may be selected in accordance with the present invention. The interface screen 122 also includes drop down menus for indicating the date of the event 126, the time of the event 128 and the price at which the seats should be sold 130. Once all selections are made, the selected information is transmitted to the central distribution processor by clicking on the transmit button 1

In this way, the remote show box office employee need only pick a specific spectator event for which he or she wishes to designate premium tickets to be made available via the present system and click upon the specific premium seats shown on the seating diagram to designate those premium tickets the producer of the spectator event wishes to make available through the present system. Once the spectator event employee selects the designated premium seats, the interface software combines the selected seats with ticket cost information. The information is then formatted and transmitted to the central distribution processor 110. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, it is contemplated that the ticket cost will be set at an amount previously agreed upon by the producer and the operator of the present system. While a preferred embodiment utilizes a computer network for transmitting information to the central distribution processor, it is contemplated that the information may be transmitted in other ways, for example, via facsimile, or other electronic communication mechanisms.

In accordance with an alternate embodiment for establishing a market value at which to sell premium tickets, tickets may be sold via an auction type arrangement wherein patrons will be able to bid upon tickets within a predefined time frame.

While a computer interface is disclosed in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, it is contemplated that producers may fax or otherwise transmit premium ticket information to the operator of the present system for inclusion in the central distribution processor 10. Where the information is faxed, telephoned or otherwise transmitted to the operator of the present system in a manually oriented manner, the premium ticket information will be manual input into the central distribution processor 110 by the operator of the present system.

It is contemplated that the premium ticket information will be made available to patrons on a daily basis with the premium ticket information being released at a predetermined time before the spectator event. However, since remote show box offices 112 have control over when to release premium tickets via the interface software 113, the

remote show box offices 112 may choose to release premium tickets over a period of time if they find such a distribution technique enhances overall sales of tickets.

It should be understood that the present system links a plurality of distinct, unrelated spectator events through the application of the interface software described above. The present system, therefore, does not require that the distinct spectator events operate in a similar manner or that the distinct spectator events form a type of affiliation. Rather, the use of the present interface software 113 in conjunction with the central distribution processor 110 allows these distinct spectator events to operate independently, while permitting the producers of the spectator events to readily distribute premium tickets when it is determined additional profit may be made through the sale of these premium tickets.

For example, the remote show box office 112 may decide to release ten front row seats one week before the spectator event and later determine to release an additional ten front row seats two days before the spectator event. Decision making regarding when and how many tickets to release is enhanced by providing the interface software 113 with functionality permitting the remote show box office 112 to monitor sales of their released tickets at the ticket information and sales site 116. Specifically, the remote show box office 112 is provided with limited access to the central distribution processor 110, permitting retrieval of information concerning ticket sales via the present system. As such, if the remote show box office finds that the ten premium tickets released one week before the spectator event are going quickly, they may decide to release additional premium tickets to the central distribution processor 110, if such tickets are still available. The present system allows these remote show box offices 112 to conveniently, reliably and quickly release tickets to meet patrons' demand and ensure that the optimum profit is made for each of the tickets sold to the spectator event. Similarly, producers utilizing the present system will be provided access to the central distribution processor 110 allowing them to take back tickets they need, and which have not already been sold.

From a business perspective, it is contemplated that the producer of the spectator event and the operator of the present system will split the premium paid on the sale of the premium tickets. For example, where a 50/50 split is agreed upon and a premium ticket having a face value of \$100 is sold for \$200, the producer of the spectator event will receive \$100 based upon the face value of the ticket and an additional \$50 based upon the premium paid, while the operator of the present system will receive \$50 based upon the premium paid. It is also contemplated that operators of the present system may generate income

through a commission based system either in combination with a defined split arrangement or as a separate arrangement.

In addition to the distribution of tickets it is further contemplated the present invention may be applied to restaurant reservations. With reference to Figure 5 and 6, a system for the distribution of discounted restaurant reservations is disclosed. The system includes a central distribution processor 210 linked to a plurality of restaurants 212, permitting consumers to obtain restaurant reservations with discounted meals, and other promotions. The discounted reservations offered by this system are primarily designed to attract consumers to restaurants during non-peak times. For example, the discounted reservations may include a 2 for 1 deal, 50% off deal, half price entree deal, etc., when the consumer eats at a low volume time.

In particular, and as discussed above in the Background of the Invention, restaurants commonly encounter low volume at times before and after the most popular meal times. Since restaurants are open during these times, and are therefore paying staff, utilities and other expenses associated with the operation of a restaurant, any unused tables during these periods are wasted. Use of these tables, even when food is discounted, would result in a benefit to the restaurant when compared to total non-use commonly encountered during low volume times. As such, the present system provides restaurants with a mechanism by which they may entice consumers to eat at their restaurant during low volume periods.

Specifically, and as applied to the marketing of restaurant reservations, the system includes a central distribution processor 210 which monitors, maintains and provides access to information regarding the availability of discounted restaurant reservations. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, consumers are provided access to the information maintained in the central distribution processor 210 via a kiosk 214, telephone 216, global communication network 218 (e.g., WWW), or other patron interface, through which patrons may browse available discounted restaurant reservations. Although the communication systems described above are generally wire based, communication may be achieved via wireless systems as may be developed in the future.

The system further includes a plurality of remote and distinct restaurants 212 linked to the central distribution processor 210. The restaurants 212 are provided with computer communication equipment, including interface software 213 compatible with the central distribution processor 210, for facilitating the uploading of relevant discounted reservation information to the central distribution processor 210. The interface software 213 further

provides a user interface 222 through which the plurality of restaurants selectively enter available reservation and discount information, which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor 210 for access and purchase by consumers.

Although it is contemplated that the central distribution processor 210 may be accessed via telephone or via the Internet, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the central distribution processor 210 is maintained at, or in association with, a reservation information and sales site 220. The reservation information and sales site 220 provides consumers with a convenient location at which they may gather reservation information and/or purchase available reservations/discounts. The reservation information and sales site 220 is further provided with a plurality of computer terminals operated by employees of the company operating the present system. The reservation information and sales site 220 is also provided with an information board upon which available reservations, and associated discounts, are listed for convenient review by consumers in the vicinity of the reservation information and sales site 220.

Based upon the preferred set up for the reservation information and sales site 220, a consumer is provided ready access to ascertain available reservations and associated discounts, and to purchase the same from a system employee. Reservation information may be retrieved by either personally consulting with an employee operating a computer terminal directly linked to the central distribution processor 210 or merely reviewing the information presented on the information board positioned for easy access by consumers in the vicinity of the reservation information and sales site 220.

In an effort to provide consumers with information regarding the various restaurants for which reservations are available, the reservation information and sales site 220 is further provided with computer monitors displaying the menus and reviews for the participating restaurants. Written literature regarding the various restaurants is also made available to consumers requiring information before deciding upon which restaurant to visit.

As mentioned above, the central distribution processor 210 is linked to a plurality of remote restaurants 212 via computers located at the restaurants. Facilitating communication between the various restaurants 212 participating in the present system and the central distribution processor 210 is an interface software 213 compatible with the central distribution processor 210. The interface software 213 is loaded on a computer at each of the remote restaurants 212 and permits these restaurants to conveniently and reliably transmit reservation/discount information to the central distribution processor 210 such that

the discounted reservations are immediately made available to consumers taking advantage of the present system.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the interface software 213 directs employees of the remote restaurants on entering discounted reservations in such a way that the discounted reservation information is formatted by the interface software. The formatted information is then transmitted for ready use by the central distribution processor 210. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the interface screen 222 is provided with menus for selecting time slots for specific reservations and the various discounts associated with the designated reservations. For example, the interface screen may be provided with drop down menus relating to TIME SLOTS 224, DISCOUNTS 226 and NUMBER OF RESERVATIONS OFFERED 228. Once the various parameters of the offered reservations are set, the restaurant employee need only press the TRANSMIT 230 button.

In this way, the remote restaurant employee need only pick specific times for which he or she wishes to designate available discounted reservations to be made available via the present system and click upon the specific reservation times shown on the interface to designate those unused reservations the restaurant wishes to make available through the present system. Once the restaurant employee selects to the designated reservations and discounts, the information is formatted and transmitted to the central distribution processor 210. While a preferred embodiment utilizes a computer network for transmitting information to the central distribution processor, it is contemplated that the information may be transmitted in other ways, for example, via facsimile, or other electronic communication mechanisms.

It is contemplated that the reservation/discount information will be made available to consumers on a regular basis with the discounted reservation information being released on a daily or weekly basis at a predetermined time before a specific restaurant seating. However, since remote restaurants have control over when to release discounted reservations via the interface software, the remote restaurants may choose to release reservations throughout a given day if they find such a distribution technique enhances overall use of the various reservations.

It should be understood that the present system links a variety of distinct, unrelated restaurants through the application of the interface software described above. The present system, therefore, does not require that the distinct restaurants operate in a similar manner

or that the distinct restaurants form a type of affiliation. Rather, the use of the present interface software in conjunction with the central distribution processor allows these distinct restaurants to operate independently, while permitting the restaurants to readily distribute discounted reservations when it is determined they may go to waste via sales through the restaurant's own marketing.

From a business perspective, it is contemplated that both the consumer and remote restaurant will pay the operator of the present system a fee for the use of the present system. Specifically, it is contemplated that the consumer will pay a reservation fee and the remote restaurant is responsible for paying the system operators a fee based upon the value of the discounted reservation sold via the present system.

In addition to the distribution of discounted restaurant reservations, it is contemplated that the present system may be employed in other "use it or lose it" business. For example, it is contemplated the present system may be employed in the marketing of discounted golf tee times.

It is further contemplated that the present invention may similarly be applied in the distribution of premium restaurant reservations for which patrons will be expected to pay a premium reservation fee. This service would be applied for restaurants which are very difficult to get into, and, as such, consumers would be willing to pay a reservation fee to avoid the wait common at many very popular restaurants. Such a system would be implemented in much the same manner as the discounted distribution system described above. For example, the contemplated system includes a central distribution processor which monitors, maintains and provides access to information regarding the availability of premium restaurant reservations. The premium restaurant reservations for sale by the present system are released via the participating restaurants and this information is forwarded to the central distribution processor in the manner described above with regard to the release of discounted restaurant reservations. As discussed above, the participating restaurants linked to the central distribution processor include interface software compatible with the central distribution processor for facilitating the uploading of relevant reservation information to the central distribution processor. The interface software further provides a user interface through which the plurality of participating restaurants selectively enter available reservation information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor for access and purchase by restaurant patrons.

The consumers are ultimately provided access to the premium reservation

information maintained in the central distribution processor via a kiosk, or other patron interface, at which patrons may browse and purchase available restaurant reservation.

While a preferred embodiment of the present invention is directed to the distribution of theater tickets in the manner described above, those skilled in the art will certainly appreciate that the principles of the present invention may be applied to other ticket distribution situations without departing from the spirit of the present invention. For example, the principles of the present invention may be applied to the distribution of sporting event tickets, movie tickets, concert tickets, etc. while still remaining within the spirit of the present invention.

While the preferred embodiments have been shown and described, it will be understood that there is no intent to limit the invention by such disclosure, but rather, is intended to cover all modifications and alternate constructions falling within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims.

CLAIMS

1. A system for facilitating the distribution of unused theater tickets, comprising:
a central distribution processor to which theater patrons are provided access for determining the availability of theater tickets and purchasing available theater tickets at a discounted rate;
a plurality of remote ticket offices of distinct theaters linked to the central distribution processor, the remote ticket offices including interface software compatible with the central distribution processor for facilitating the uploading of relevant ticket information to the central distribution processor; and
wherein the interface software further provides a user interface through which the plurality of remote ticket offices selectively enter available theater ticket information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor for access and purchase by theater patrons.
2. The system according to claim 1, wherein the theater patron pays a ticketing fee to an operator of the system.
3. The system according to claim 1, wherein the distinct theaters pay the operator a fee based upon the sale of discounted tickets.
4. The system according to claim 1, wherein the user interface includes a seating chart display through which a remote ticket office employee enters unused ticket information.
5. A method for distributing potentially unused tickets, comprising the following steps:
establishing a central distribution processor which stores information concerning the availability of tickets which may be purchased at a discounted price;
installing interface software compatible with the central distribution processor at a plurality of remote ticket offices, the interface software facilitating the uploading of relevant ticket information to the central distribution processor;
entering available ticket information at the remote ticket office via a user interface associated with the interface software, the user interface permitting the plurality of remote ticket offices to selectively enter available ticket information for uploading to the central distribution processor;

uploading the available ticket information to the central distribution processor; and
providing theater patrons with access to the central distribution processor for
determining the availability of tickets and purchasing available tickets.

6. The method according to claim 5, further including the step of charging the patron
a ticketing fee when a ticket is purchased.

7. The method according to claim 5, further including the step of charging distinct
venues a fee based upon the sale of discounted tickets.

8. The method according to claim 5, wherein the user interface includes a seating chart
display through which a remote ticket office employee enters unused ticket information.

9. A system for facilitating the distribution of unused tickets, comprising:
a central distribution processor to which patrons are provided access for determining
the availability of tickets and purchasing available tickets at a discounted rate;
a plurality of remote ticket offices of distinct venues linked to the central distribution
processor, the remote ticket offices including interface software compatible with the central
distribution processor for facilitating the uploading of relevant ticket information to the
central distribution processor; and
wherein the interface software further provides a user interface through which the
plurality of remote ticket offices selectively enter available ticket information which is
subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor for access and purchase by
patrons.

10. The system according to claim 9, wherein the patron pays a ticketing fee to an
operator of the system.

11. The system according to claim 9, wherein the distinct venues pay the operator a fee
based upon the sale of discounted tickets.

12. The system according to claim 9, wherein the user interface includes a seating chart
display through which a remote ticket office employee enters unused ticket information.

13. A system for facilitating the distribution of premium tickets to spectator events, comprising:

a central distribution processor to which patrons are provided access for determining the availability of premium tickets and purchasing available premium tickets at a premium price;

a plurality of remote show box offices of distinct spectator events linked to the central distribution processor, the remote show box offices including interface software compatible with the central distribution processor for facilitating the uploading of relevant ticket information to the central distribution processor; and

wherein the interface software further provides a user interface through which the plurality of remote show box offices selectively enter available premium ticket information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor for access and purchase by patrons.

14. The system according to claim 13, wherein a producer of the spectator event and an operator of the present system split the premium price in a predetermined manner.

15. The system according to claim 13, wherein an operator of the present system receives a commission based upon the sale of premium tickets.

16. The system according to claim 13, wherein the user interface includes a seating chart display through which a remote show box office employee enters premium ticket information.

17. A method for distributing premium tickets to spectator events, comprising the following steps:

establishing a central distribution processor which stores information concerning the availability of premium tickets to spectator events which may be purchased at a premium price;

installing interface software compatible with the central distribution processor at a plurality of remote show box offices, the interface software facilitating the uploading of relevant premium ticket information to the central distribution processor;

entering available premium ticket information at the spectator event remote show

box office via a user interface associated with the interface software, the user interface permitting the plurality of remote show box offices to selectively enter available premium ticket information for uploading to the central distribution processor;

uploading the available premium ticket information to the central distribution processor; and

providing patrons with access to the central distribution processor for determining the availability of premium tickets and purchasing available premium tickets.

18. The method according to claim 17, further including the step of a producer of the spectator event and an operator of the present system splitting the premium price in a predetermined manner.

19. The method according to claim 17, wherein an operator of the present system receives a commission based upon the sale of premium tickets.

20. The method according to claim 17, wherein the user interface includes a seating chart display through which a remote show box office employee enters premium ticket information.

21. A system for marketing restaurant reservations during non-peak periods by offering promotions through a central distribution system, comprising:

a central distribution processor to which consumers are provided access for determining the availability of discounted restaurant reservations and purchasing discounted restaurant reservations;

a plurality of remote restaurants linked to the central distribution processor, the remote restaurants including interface software compatible with the central distribution processor for facilitating the uploading of relevant discounted restaurant reservations to the central distribution processor;

the interface software further provides a user interface through which the plurality of remote restaurants selectively enter available discounted restaurant reservation information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor for access and purchase by consumers.

22. The system according to claim 21, wherein the consumer pays a reservation fee to an operator of the system.
23. The system according to claim 21, wherein the restaurants pay the operator a fee based upon the sale of discounted restaurant reservations.
24. The system according to claim 21, wherein the user interface includes a seating chart display through which a restaurant employee enters discounted reservation information.
25. A method for marketing restaurant reservations through a central distribution system, comprising the following steps:
- establishing a central distribution processor which stores information concerning the availability of restaurant reservations;
 - installing interface software compatible with the central distribution processor at a plurality of remote restaurants, the interface software facilitating the uploading of relevant restaurant reservation information to the central distribution processor;
 - entering available restaurant reservation information at the remote restaurant via a user interface associated with the interface software, the user interface permitting the plurality of remote restaurants to selectively enter available reservation information for uploading to the central distribution processor;
 - uploading the restaurant reservation information to the central distribution processor; and
 - providing consumers with access to the central distribution processor for determining the availability of restaurant reservations and purchasing discounted restaurant reservations.
26. The method according to claim 25, further including the step of charging the consumer a reservation fee when a restaurant reservation is purchased.
27. The method according to claim 25, further including the step of charging the restaurant a fee based upon the sale of restaurant reservations.

28. The method according to claim 25, wherein the user interface includes a seating chart display through which a restaurant employee enters discounted restaurant reservation information.

29. A system for marketing restaurant reservations through a central distribution system, comprising:

- a central distribution processor to which consumers are provided access for determining the availability of restaurant reservations and purchasing restaurant reservations;

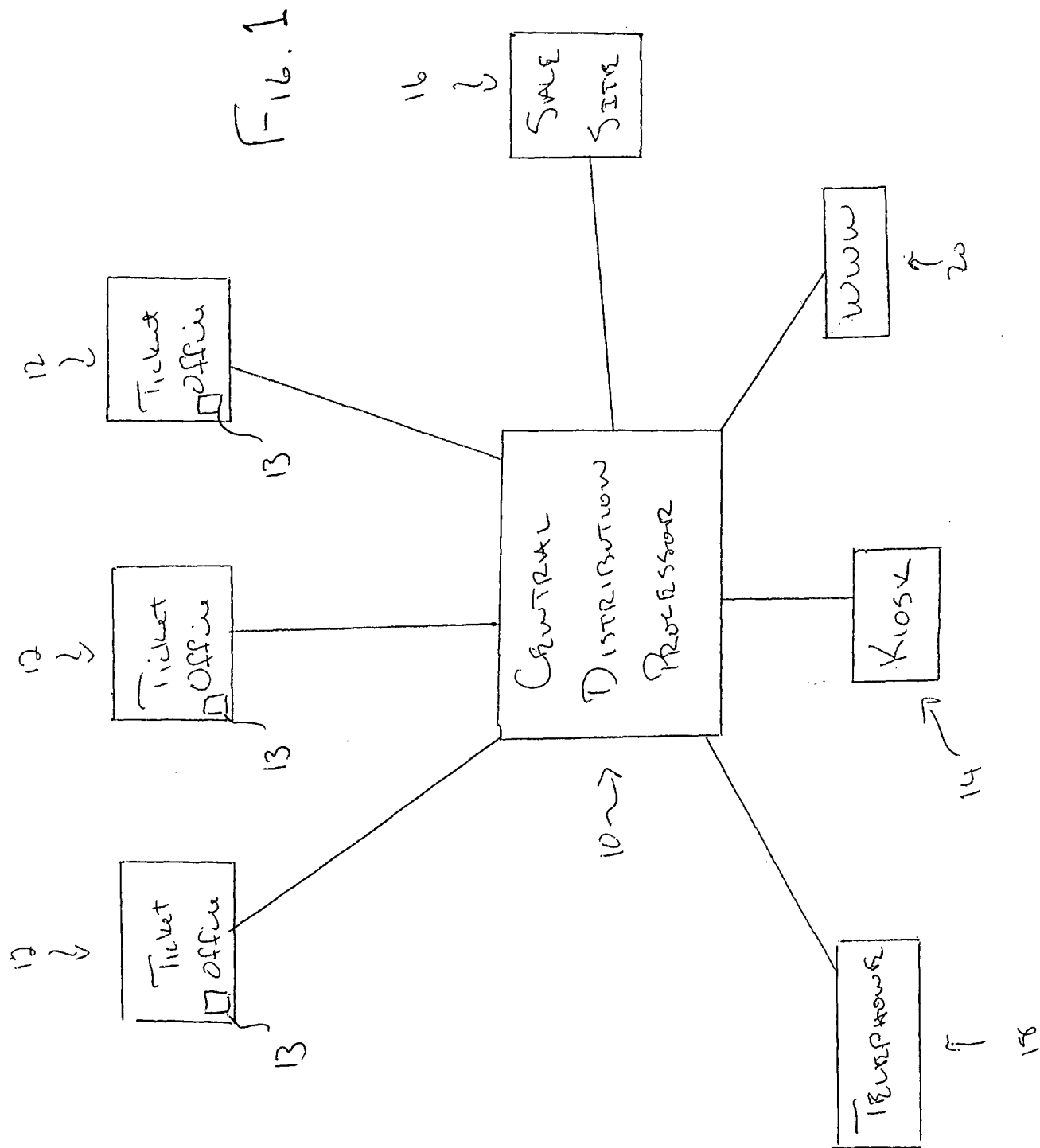
- a plurality of remote restaurants linked to the central distribution processor, the remote restaurants including interface software compatible with the central distribution processor for facilitating the uploading of relevant restaurant reservations to the central distribution processor;

- the interface software further provides a user interface through which the plurality of remote restaurants selectively enter available restaurant reservation information which is subsequently uploaded to the central distribution processor for access and purchase by consumers.

30. The system according to claim 29, wherein the consumer pays a reservation fee to an operator of the system.

31. The system according to claim 29, wherein the restaurants pay the operator a fee based upon the sale of restaurant reservations.

32. The system according to claim 29, wherein the user interface includes a seating chart display through which a restaurant employee enters reservation information.



22

DISCOUNTED TICKETS

26
DATE

28
TIME

30
PRICE

32

TRANSMIT

24

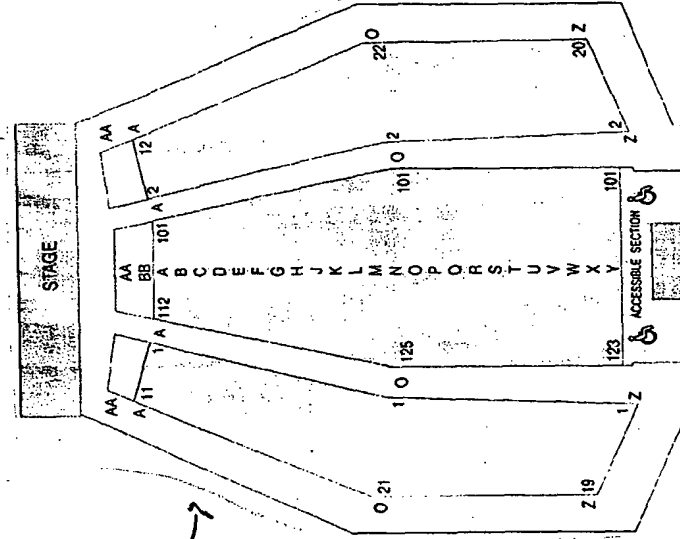


FIG. 2

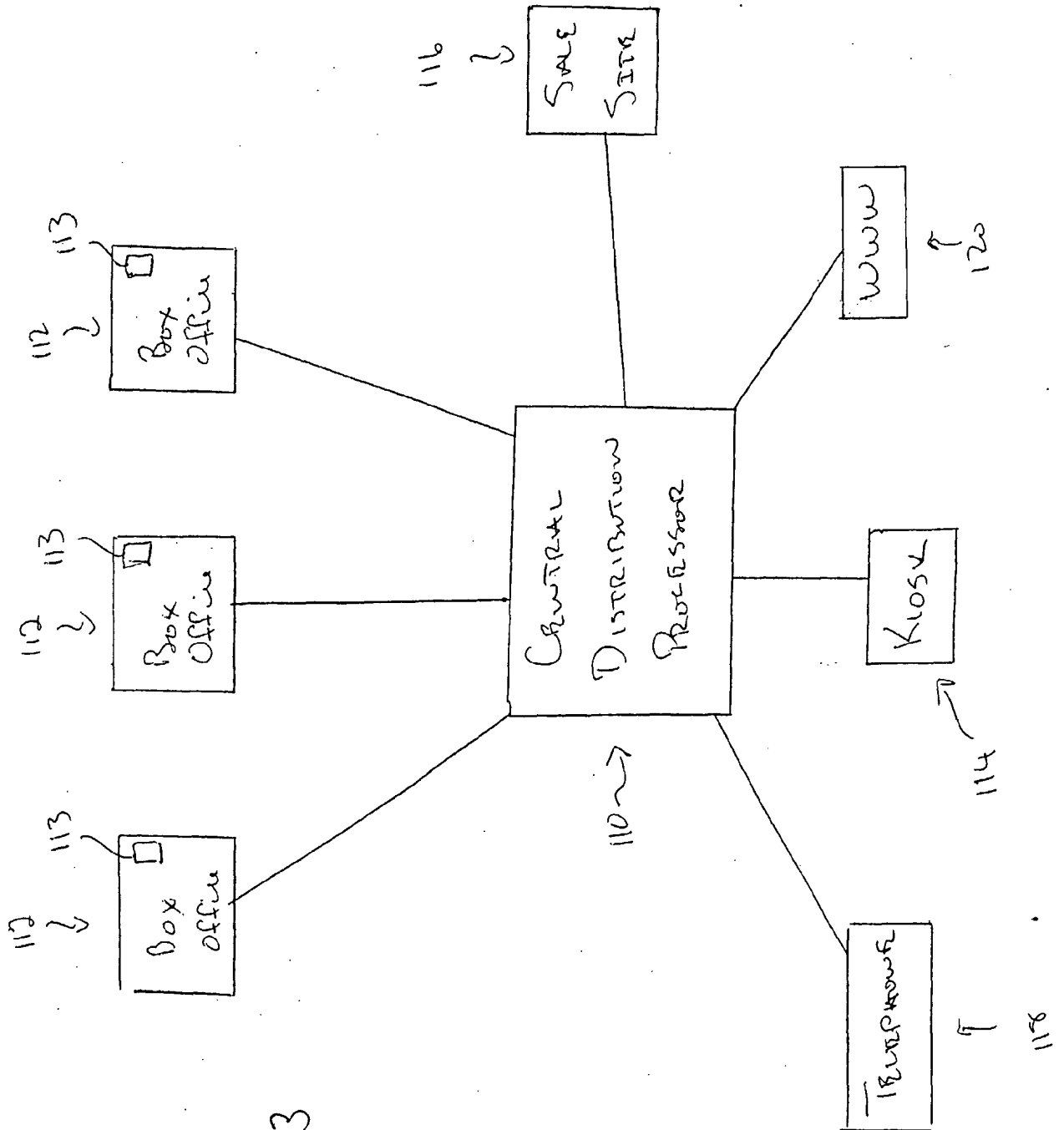


Fig. 3

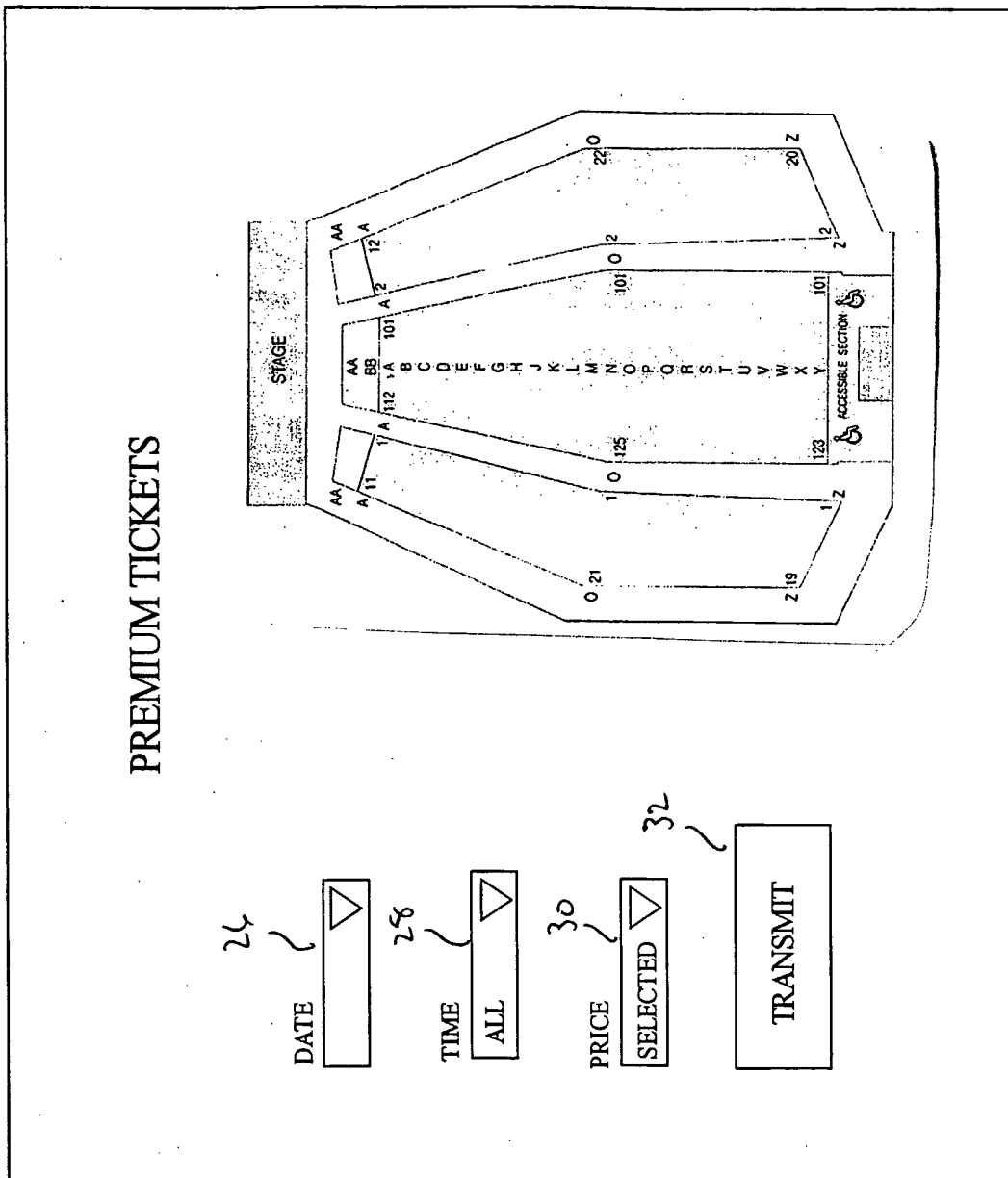
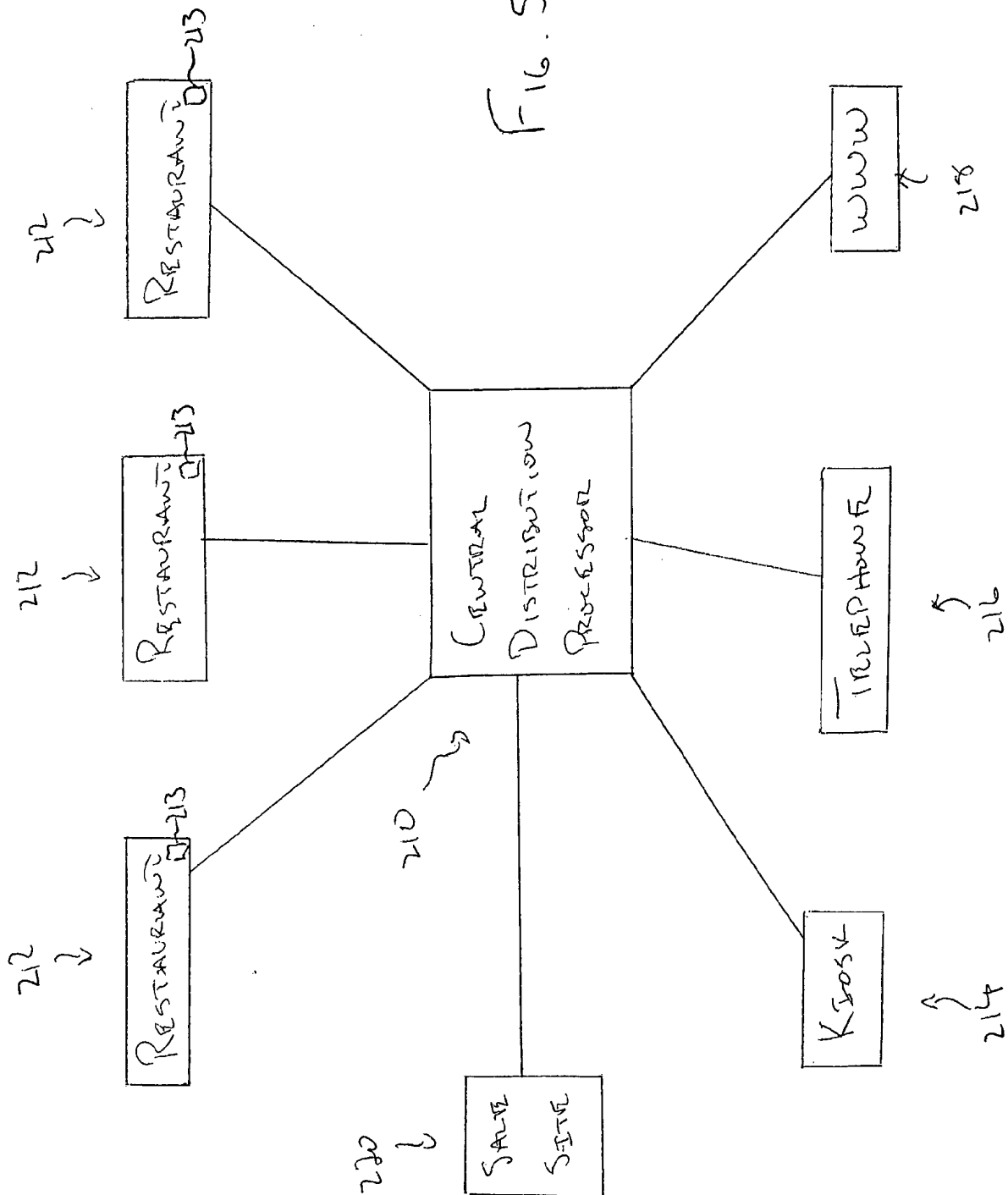


FIG. 5



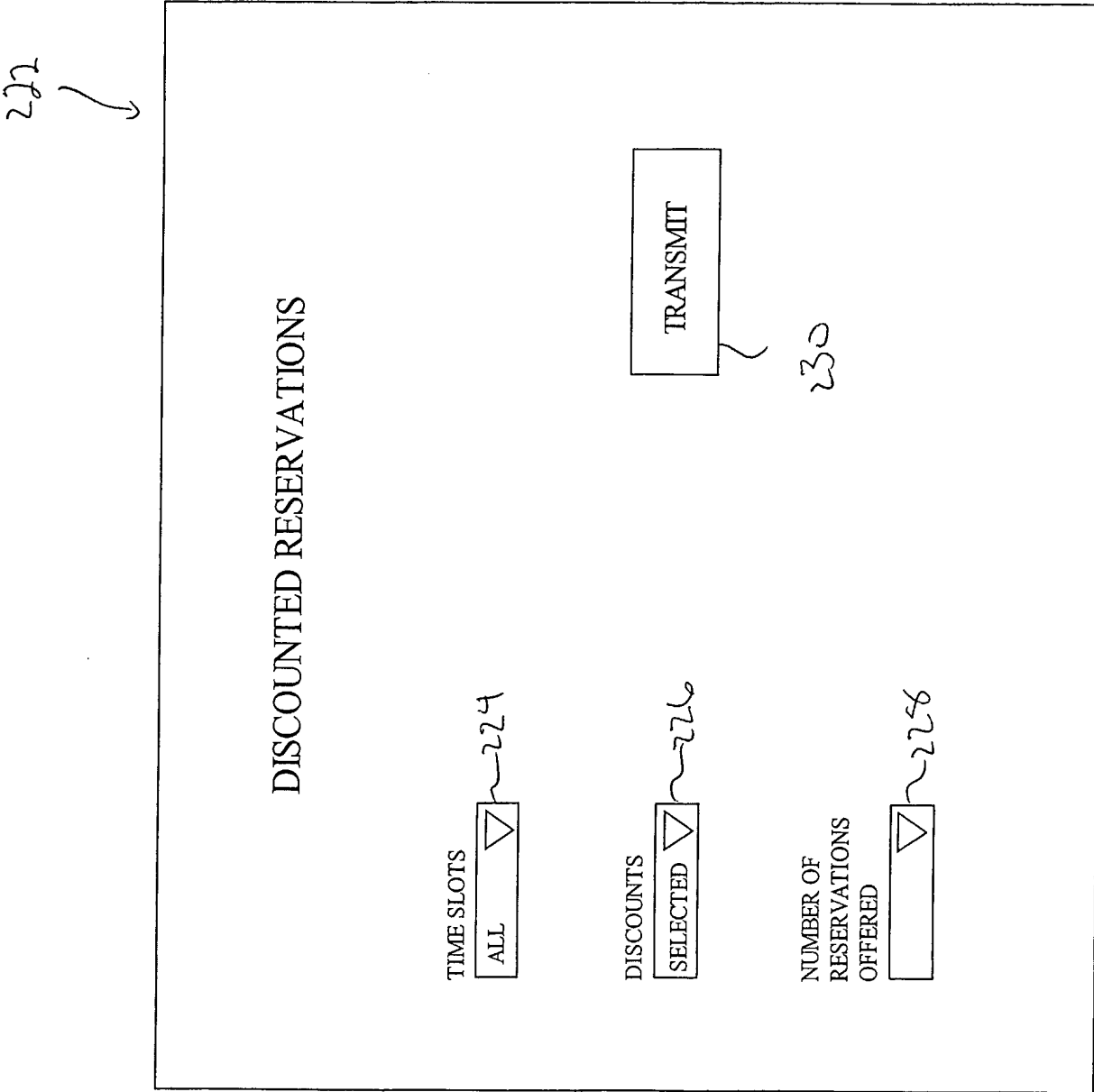


FIG. 6